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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 7482
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2303
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3405
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002810

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media led with a possible split in Kadima that would bolster Likud. Maariv banners PM Benjamin Netanyahu's Qrevenge plan, saying that the PM does not forgive former PM Ariel Sharon for creating Kadima and crushing Likud. Yediot reported that Sharon's son Gilad appealed Kadima members not to leave the party Qfor his

father's sake. Last night Israel TV reported that six Kadima Knesset members have initialed a request to leave their faction. The media reported that Kadima MK Eli Aflalo intends to form a one-man faction. HaQaretz reported that Kadima chair Tzipi Livni and MK Shaul Mofaz are waging a proxy war over the party leadership. In an unrelated development, The Jerusalem Post reported that PM Netanyahu told the Knesset plenum yesterday that in the face of the Iranian nuclear threat, concerted attacks in Israel's right to exist, and a stalled peace process, it was imperative for the opposition to support the government.

The media reported that Hamas will respond in a few days to Israel's prisoner swap offer. Israeli media echo reports in media outlets in Gaza yesterday that a Hamas delegation would head from Gaza to Cairo today, and then to Damascus, where they would meet with members of Hamas' political wing there to discuss their response to what Israel has put on the table. The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior European official as saying yesterday that it is altogether premature to talk about deporting to Europe any prisoners released in a possible swap.

The Jerusalem Post cited a report published yesterday by the Israeli human rights groups B'Tselem and Bimkom that Israel had always intended to annex Maqaleh Adumim as part of Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Post reported that this week the IDF and Foreign Ministry held a joint seminar to boost Israel's international standing.

The Jerusalem Post and other media noted that the U.S. stresses that Iran should take the year-end deadline seriously.

Yediot and Israel Radio reported that 15 IDF soldiers who were wounded during Operation Cast Lead are seeking legal action in Belgium against 10 top Hamas leaders. The appellants are binational Israeli/Belgian citizens.

Leading media quoted Syrian President Bashar Assad as saying yesterday, after talks with Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Damascus, that peace talks with Israel had been stalled because Israel was not interested in achieving peace. Assad was quoted as saying that Israel's demand for negotiations without conditions meant that it wanted to bring down the peace process.

Israel Radio reported that 200 young people about to be drafted have signed a petition that they will refuse any orders that contradict the Torah according to rabbi's understanding.

HaQaretz quoted Hannah Rosenthal, head of the U.S. administration's Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism as saying that remarks by Israel's Ambassador to the U.S., Michael Oren, against the liberal Jewish lobby J Street were "most unfortunate." In an interview with HaQaretz in Jerusalem, where Rosenthal was the administration's envoy to the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism, Rosenthal, who once served on J Street's board of directors, said she opposes blurring the lines between anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel.

Citing the AP, HaQaretz reported that the Vatican has clarified that the elevation of the late Pope Pius XII to the title of venerable does not constitute a hostile act toward the Jews. For its part, Maariv reported that Jewish pressure has slowed down Pius XII's beatification process begun by Pope Benedict XVI.

Yediot reported that 11 Israelis are hostages in the U.S.: eight young Israeli women and three young Israeli men were arrested for working illegally in Seattle malls.

Major media reported that yesterday Ike Aranne (Yitzhak Ahronovitch), the captain of the famed refugee ship Exodus 1947, died in Hadera at the age of 86 after a long illness.

Yediot published the findings of a Dahaf/Mina Zemach poll:
- 76 percent of Israelis favor a prisoner swap under the conditions set by the GOI; 14 percent oppose such a deal; 10 percent are undecided.
- 65 percent are satisfied with the performance of PM Netanyahu; 25 percent are dissatisfied; 10 percent are undecided.

- 69 percent are satisfied with the performance of IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi; 12 percent are dissatisfied; 19 percent are undecided.
- Only 44 percent are satisfied with the performance of DM Ehud Barak; 41 percent are dissatisfied; 15 percent are undecided.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

I. QEvasiveness and Foot-Dragging

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/24): QThe framework of the deal [over Gilad Shalit's release] was agreed on in Olmert's term and Netanyahu has not succeeded in changing it in his nine months in office. Deporting the released prisoners will change nothing, if instead of returning to the West Bank -- where they will be supervised by the Shin Bet and Palestinian Authority -- they will travel the world, planning terror attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets. Instead of wasting any more time on futile one-upmanship games with Hamas, Netanyahu must say: It stops here. It's time to decide. End Gilad and his family's suffering and bring the soldier home.

II. QEverything, We Repeat, Everything, at All Costs

Dr. Muhammad Watad, a senior law lecturer at the Safed Academic College, wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/24): QIsrael should have paid before [Gilad Shalit's] abduction to prevent it. When it failed to do so and Gilad was abducted, [the official word was that] the Qstate must do everything, repeat everything, and at all costs to return the son.... Besides, Israel has not done the Shalit family any favor, and the claims by the families of the terror victims -- however heartrending they may be -- are only Qemotional.Q I believe that, had the victims had been alive and had that been known for certain, their screams of Qreturn the sons home would even have torn the separation fence.

III. QLeftists Voted for Kadima's Likudniks

Former Meretz leader, former Justice Minister, and chief Israeli promoter of the Geneva Initiative, Yossi Beilin, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (12/24): QWhen Kadima was founded, figures from Likud and the Labor Party joined it; it won the elections under Ehud Olmert and hit Likud in its most tender spot. Then an interesting phenomenon appeared: Olmert's moderate utterances sent the Likudniks back to Likud. Those who remained Kadima supporters presented positions closer to Meretz than to the Labor Party. Labor, Meretz, and Shinui voters chose Kadima during the 2009 elections. The only former Likudniks who remained in Kadima were its Knesset members. It would only be natural for them to come back to their natural places. Instead of raising false claims of the move's illegitimacy or problematic timing, I would make efforts to ensure a Kadima-Meretz-Labor rebel. This would represent suitable quantitative and qualitative compensation that would stabilize opposite the center-right bloc -- at last a center-left bloc.

IV. QBibi, King of Israel

Far left columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz (12/24): QThe charade of soul-searching surrounding the Gilad Shalit deal staged by the forum of seven senior cabinet ministers revealed that it was in fact an unnecessary effort, and that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is virtually omnipotent and could have forced the passage of any resolution. We have not had such a strong prime minister in a long time. FYI to the Americans, who like to think that Netanyahu wants to do the right thing but can't; as well as to the Europeans, the Arabs and especially the Israelis: There are no domestic politics in Israel now, because there is no one who poses a genuine threat to Netanyahu. He has no opposition, neither within his party nor without, neither parliamentary nor extra-parliamentary. His seat is safe. Above all these words are addressed to Netanyahu himself, that master of intimidation and wizard of self-inflicted

fear.

IV. Religious Zionists Must Disown the Zealots

Columnist and conservative international Jewish leader Isi Leibler wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/24): Religious Zionists are confronted by an unenviable challenge which could permanently undermine their status in Israel. From being regarded by the mainstream as the voice of religious moderation and a force of societal unification -- whose youth have earned the reputation as role models of devotion and dedication to the state and its defense -- they are now teetering on marginalization at best, and stigmatized as zealots at worst. The current impasse was an inevitable consequence of edicts issued by a number of rabbis proclaiming that forfeiture of territory in the Land of Israel constitutes a breach of Halacha [Jewish religious law]. These rabbis refused to consider any exceptions to this decree -- not even for *Qpikuah nefesh*, the requirement to safeguard human life, which overrides most halachic injunctions. Nor were they willing to respect the authority of the majority of their rabbinical colleagues, who disagreed with their interpretation of Jewish law and also recognized the potential societal polarization it would create.... [Correcting this situation] will require courage and determination, particularly by moderate religious-Zionist laymen. These represent the vast majority of religious Zionists whose commitment to the state is unconditional, but have hitherto lacked the backbone to resist, condemn and ostracize the extremists. They must do so now, before this hesder [the institution combining military service with religious studies]-IDF imbroglio spins out of control, endangering the entire religious-Zionist enterprise. This would represent a great loss not only for the IDF, but for the entire nation.

CUNNINGHAM